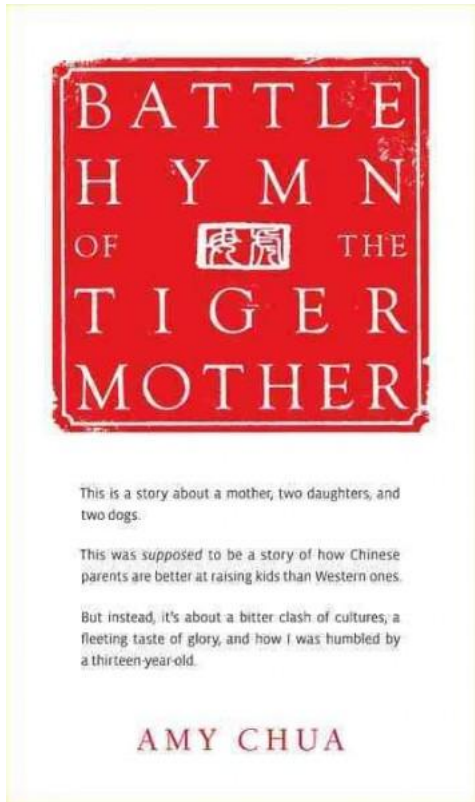


About the book...



An awe-inspiring, often hilarious, and unerringly honest story of one mother's exercise in extreme parenting, revealing the rewards-and the costs-of raising her children the Chinese way.

All decent parents want to do what's best for their children. What *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* reveals is that the Chinese just have a totally different idea of how to do that. Western parents try to respect their children's individuality, encouraging them to pursue their true passions and providing a nurturing environment. The Chinese believe that the best way to protect your children is by preparing them for the future and arming them with skills, strong work habits, and inner confidence. *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* chronicles Chua's iron-willed decision to raise her daughters, Sophia and Lulu, her way-the Chinese way-and the remarkable results her choice inspires.

About the author...



A distinguished Professor at the Yale Law School, Amy Chua has authored two other extraordinary books. Her book, [*Day of Empire: How Hyperpowers Rise to Global Dominance—and Why They Fall*](#), examines history's handful of dominant world powers to reveal the reasons behind their success and the roots of their ultimate demise.

Amy Chua is John M. Duff, Jr. Professor of Law at Yale Law School. She also has taught law at Duke, Stanford, and New York Universities. She has been a Wall Street lawyer who worked on the privatization of Telmex, the national telephone company of Mexico.

Along with Barack Obama, Steve Jobs and Richard Muller, Amy is a 2011 **Brave Thinker** by *The Atlantic* magazine. Amy is also one of The 2011 **Time** 100 Most Influential People — and photographed with two *live* tigers. Most recently Amy was chosen to *Foreign Policy's* Top 100 Global Thinkers 2011.

A CONVERSATION WITH AMY CHUA (<http://us.penguin.com>)

Q. In your introduction you note that this was supposed to be a book about parenting and it evolved into a different sort of story over time. Can you talk about the book's evolution? What surprised you in the process of writing it?

I'm embarrassed to say that I intended *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* to be much more literary, the farthest thing from a parenting guide! It's actually a pretty complex book, and I was hoping that readers would appreciate its humor and irony. Believe it or not, the models for my book were Dave Eggers's *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* and David Sedaris's *Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim*—both books with unreliable narrators. The narrator of my book is a patently flawed character—initially obtuse, boastful, outrageously overconfident—who goes through a crisis and transformation. Much of the book is self-parody. For example, there's one part when I'm talking about my dog, and I say, "I had finally come to see that Coco was an animal." Anyone who read that line straight must have assumed that I had pretty low cognition skills!

Q. *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* is a departure from your other books, which are more focused on politics and history. What made you decide to write something so personal?

Actually, I wrote this book in a moment of crisis, when at age thirteen my younger daughter, Lulu, rebelled against my strict parenting and seemed to turn against everything I stood for. Around the same time, my younger sister, Katrin, got leukemia and had to have a bone marrow transplant. Her kids were just ten and one at the time. It was the darkest two years of my life, and for the first time, I began asking myself, "Have I done everything wrong?" After one terrible public fight with Lulu—the culminating point of the book, which takes place in Red Square, Moscow—I suddenly realized I might lose my daughter. And when it hit me that way, I didn't care a bit about school or violin; I just wanted to keep my daughter. So I pulled back—not entirely, but we sat down and talked, and a lot of things changed. Anyway, the day after the blowup in Red Square, I sat down at my computer, and even though I usually have writer's block, this time the words just poured out—I wrote the first two thirds of the book in two months. I showed every page to my daughters and my husband. It was like family therapy. In retrospect, I think writing the book—going back eighteen years to when my eldest daughter was born and I was a very different person—was an attempt to put the pieces back together and work things out for myself.

I did eight years of academic research for my first book, *World on Fire*, and five years of research for *Day of Empire*. I did zero research for *Battle Hymn*—it came from a completely different place.

Q. What were some of the challenges of putting your family relationships on paper?

Because I wanted to clear every line of the book with my husband and both daughters, there were four separate sets of memory to accommodate, so we'd often argue over the facts, then I'd have to revise to reflect everyone's comments. It wasn't always easy, but

the experience—which also included a lot of nostalgia and laughter—really did bring my family together.

My husband—who has a very strong personality—also told me that he didn't love being a character in someone else's book, so he asked me to keep him mostly in the background. But if you read between the lines, what should come through is how central he was to everything and how he dealt with my excesses—supporting me in front of the girls, advising (sometimes challenging) me behind the scenes, and bringing balance to the family.

Q. You're very honest in these pages about your own flaws. How do you imagine your readers view you, and what image do you hope they will take away from this book?

Some people will of course disagree with me, but I also received hundreds of e-mails from people—of all backgrounds, from all over the world—who wrote to say that my book made them laugh, cry, and understand their own families better. And this made everything worth it, and helped carry me through some of the rougher periods.

Some of the most touching emails I received were from people who had grown up with a tiger mother. For example:

When I read your book, I cried because I know how painful it is to be forced to such an extreme. But mostly, I cried because I recognized what my mom went through to shape me into the person I am today—the infinite hours she spent sitting through all my practices, teaching me lessons beyond my grade level, and endlessly arguing for my benefit. My mom endured my hatred and made sacrifices I can never make up to her. And, in spite of everything, she has always given me her unconditional love and patience. Reading this now makes me recall all those bittersweet moments that ultimately built my character.

It was also fun to hear from tiger parents and tiger cubs of all stripes:

OMG your book had my mom and I rolling on the floor! I'm Pakistani American, and I was the "Lulu" in our family. My mom just said, "Everyone needs to be called *katchra* once in a while."—*katchra* being the Urdu word for garbage. I can't even count the number of times my father and mother called me *katchra*, and somehow I have escaped with amazingly (astoundingly, even) high self-esteem.

But my favorite e-mails may have been from non-tiger mothers like this one:

As one of those weak Western moms who doesn't ban her kids from most activities and thinks a B+ is acceptable, I read your book and immediately recognized a kindred spirit. I appreciate your honesty about your struggles as a parent. As I am in the midst of dealing with my younger son's teenage rebellion, I can tell you that your book was a comfort and a joy to me.

Q. Your daughters were deeply involved with music throughout their childhoods. What sort of life lessons do children get from learning to play music at a young age?

I definitely think that learning music can help instill a strong work ethic, self-discipline, and focus in children—skills that are particularly important in this age of constant media distractions. But for me, music really wasn't so much about preparing my kids for the future—I didn't think of it strategically. Both the piano and the violin are capable of producing such beauty, something deeper and more meaningful than watching television or surfing the Internet for ten hours. I think both my daughters would agree with me on this one.

Q. The chapter devoted to your sister Katrin's illness introduces a new element and mood into your writing. How, for you, did this chapter change the narrative?

For me, Katrin's illness was cataclysmic and horrible—talk about suddenly questioning all of one's priorities. And it raised what may be the book's central theme. The last lines of the book are:

Given that life is so short and fragile, surely each of us should be trying to get the most out of every breath, every fleeting moment. But what does it mean to live life to its fullest?

We all have to die. But which way does that cut? In any case, I've just told Jed that I want to get another dog.

Q. You state that you're "not good at enjoying life" (p. 97) and most of your attention in raising your children seems to be focused on the future. Do you see this as a positive or negative attribute, and is it something you see in your daughters?

I'm definitely a Type A person and not so good at "living in the moment"—I don't like spas or massages, I always have a long list of to-dos, and I can only take in the beauty of a sunset for so long. But that doesn't mean I'm not a happy person. On the contrary, I have a lot of fun. I love throwing big parties (you should have seen Sophia's sixteenth birthday party; Lulu's is around the corner), going out to dinner with friends, and traveling with my family to new places. Also, this may surprise people, but my daughters think of me as a kind of zany person. They are much more scared of their father!

If I could push a magic button and choose either happiness or success for my children, I'd choose happiness in a second. But I don't think it's as simple as that. I don't believe that if parents let their kids do whatever they want, their kids will be happier. In America today, many parents are very permissive. Yet we have disturbingly high rates of teenage depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. It's also not a formula for happiness for kids to grow up and not be able to find a job as an adult.

Q. There's a lot of discussion of what has changed between the generations of your family. What values would you like to see passed on and what would you like to see evolve in the next generation?

Both Sophia and Lulu were asked in an interview by *The Guardian* (London) what kind of parents they would be when they grew up. To my surprise, they both said they would be strict parents (although both said they would allow a few more playdates). I couldn't believe my ears when Lulu told the reporter, "My mom and I have fought a lot. But I wouldn't be the person I am today if it weren't for her. And I wouldn't like that." At the same time, both Sophia and Lulu are much more public service-oriented than I am, and I deeply admire that. For understandable reasons, first-generation immigrants tend to focus mainly on their own family and the future of their children. I think it's a wonderful thing that subsequent generations tend to be more community oriented and interested in helping others and giving back.

On the other hand, I worry all the time about raising spoiled, entitled children. "Not on my watch!" I write in my book. I believe that kids with a sense of responsibility, who know when to experience gratitude and humility, will grow up to be less selfish, better-adjusted, and happier adults.

Q. Have you found the act of writing about your family's life has brought you closer to them or illuminated certain aspects of your life that you wouldn't have considered beforehand? If so, in what ways?

Writing the book definitely brought my family closer. I think Sophia and Lulu were better able to understand what was going through my head when I was say, chastising them for a bad grade or arguing for another hour at the violin. And I got a better sense of how they experienced things. But perhaps what surprised and touched me the most was how my whole family rallied around me when the global firestorm broke out. So many other teenagers might have been resentful or angry at all the harsh media attention directed at our family. But not Sophia and Lulu—I got so lucky! At the height of the tsunami Sophia published a letter in the *New York Post* defending me, which was so mischievously witty and lighthearted that I think it turned the tide of public opinion. Lulu, meanwhile, edited all my op-eds, searched the Internet (which I couldn't bear to look at) for the few rare nice comments, and texted them to me with messages like, "Here's a good one, Mommy! Some people like you!"

Q. What are you working on now? Do you have plans to write more memoirs?

I do indeed have another book in the works! But it's a secret for now. Stay tuned.

Reviews

Booklist

Chua's stated intent is to present the differences between Western and Chinese parenting styles by sharing experiences with her own children (now teenagers). As the daughter of

Chinese immigrants, she is poised to contrast the two disparate styles, even as she points out that being a "Chinese Mother" can cross ethnic lines: it is more a state of mind than a genetic trait. Yet this is a deeply personal story about her two daughters and how their lives are shaped by such demands as Chua's relentless insistence on straight A's and daily hours of mandatory music practice, even while vacationing with grandparents. Readers may be stunned by Chua's explanations of her hard-line style, and her meant-to-be humorous depictions of screaming matches intended to force greatness from her girls. She insists that Western children are no happier than Chinese ones, and that her daughters are the envy of neighbors and friends, because of their poise and musical, athletic, and academic accomplishments. Ironically, this may be read as a cautionary tale that asks just what price should be paid for achievement.

BookPage Reviews (<http://www.bookpage.com>)

Memoir explores the differences between Chinese and Western parenting

In parenting (and war), do the ends ever justify the means? If your eighth grader gives a piano recital at Carnegie Hall, does that accomplishment justify the 6–10 hours of practice daily with a mother who says things like "Oh my God, you're just getting worse and worse"? Does it justify never allowing your daughter a play-date, unstructured time or a trip to the mall?

Amy Chua would say yes, emphatically. A tenured professor at Yale Law School and a respected author of books on law and ethnicity in the developing world, Chua turns to the differences between Chinese and Western parenting in her provocative memoir, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. Unlike the "weak-willed and indulgent" Western parents she criticizes, strict Chinese parents create a "virtuous circle" of achievement by insisting that their children memorize, practice and repeat. As her book graphically demonstrates, a Chinese parent (most often a mother in this book) must force the child to work; once the child begins to excel, self-confidence follows.

Fortunately for the readability of this memoir, Chua meets her foil in the person of her younger daughter Lulu, whose indomitable will and rebellious nature challenge her mother's certainty at every turn. Unlike the pliable older daughter Sophia, whose success at the piano justifies the "virtuous circle" theory, Lulu's own achievement on the violin comes at the cost of vicious arguments and tears. Chua's Jewish husband Jed plays only a small part in this story, as an "American husband who believed that childhood should be fun," and it would have been enlightening to get his perspective. Nonetheless, Chua is unafraid of portraying herself in a less than flattering light, and this honesty serves her purpose well, dramatizing the sacrifices involved with this model of parenting.

Sure to generate controversy, Chua's candid family memoir offers valuable insight into larger cultural debates in children's education, such as the place of testing and rote repetition. By demonstrating both the successes and the unvarnished personal costs of Chua's method, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* leaves the reader wondering about the feasibility of some middle educational way, where discipline and self-expression unite. Perhaps it is up to Sophia and Lulu to write that book.

Publishers Weekly

Chua (Day of Empire) imparts the secret behind the stereotypical Asian child's phenomenal success: the Chinese mother. Chua promotes what has traditionally worked very well in raising children: strict, Old World, uncompromising values--and the parents don't have to be Chinese. What they are, however, are different from what she sees as indulgent and permissive Western parents: stressing academic performance above all, never accepting a mediocre grade, insisting on drilling and practice, and instilling respect for authority. Chua and her Jewish husband (both are professors at Yale Law) raised two girls, and her account of their formative years achieving amazing success in school and music performance proves both a model and a cautionary tale. Sophia, the eldest, was dutiful and diligent, leapfrogging over her peers in academics and as a Suzuki piano student; Lulu was also gifted, but defiant, who excelled at the violin but eventually balked at her mother's pushing. Chua's efforts "not to raise a soft, entitled child" will strike American readers as a little scary--removing her children from school for extra practice, public shaming and insults, equating Western parenting with failure--but the results, she claims somewhat glibly in this frank, unapologetic report card, "were hard to quarrel with."

Discussion questions (<http://www.readinggroupguides.com>)

- 1.** In the beginning of her book Chua describes her daughters Sophia and Lulu's personalities from birth. In what ways are they inherently different from one another?
- 2.** Chua identifies herself with her Chinese zodiac sign, the tiger. How does she exemplify its characteristics? Are there any ways in which she might defy those characteristics? Can you relate to your own zodiac sign?
- 3.** What role does music play in Chua's life as compared to her children's lives? And does music play such an important role in your own life?
- 4.** How is Lulu and Sophia's childhood different from their mother's, as Chua describes them? Do you see similarities and differences in your own childhood?
- 5.** Never a pet lover, Chua reluctantly ends up raising two dogs, Coco and Pushkin. How do the dogs change her, and what does she learn from them?
- 6.** What do you think about Chua's relationship with her younger daughter, Lulu? How do they push each other's buttons?
- 7.** Chua only intermittently discusses her husband's opinions, but mostly keeps him out of her memoir. What can you glean about him from these pages?
- 8.** If you could ask Chua one question, what would it be?
- 9.** At the end of the book Chua expresses some regrets about her choices. What does she regret and how do you imagine she might do things differently, given the chance?

Readalikes (*Books & Author*)

[*Bad Mother: A Chronicle of Maternal Crimes, Minor Calamities, and Occasional Moments of Grace*](#) by Ayelet Waldman

A collection of 18 essays. A mother of four who once confessed to loving her husband more than her children. In the essays, Waldman writes about feminism, her childhood, her close relationship with her husband and their family dynamics, and her children, with the overarching theme that it is impossible to be a "good" mother in today's society, and that women are constantly made to feel guilty. She makes honest confessions about her personal life in the book, including aborting a fetus with a genetic defect, and states that women need to do the best they can and learn to forgive themselves for everything else.

[*Cinderella Ate My Daughter: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the New Girlie-Girl Culture*](#) by Peggy Orenstein

Peggy Orenstein examines firsthand a burgeoning industry devoted solely to making girls act feminine to the extreme. Orenstein visits various tourist attractions and events that concentrate on the girlyness of girls, such as Walt Disney World, the American Girl Place, a Miley Cyrus concert, and more. She finds disturbing influences that focus on outer beauty and the sexualization of girls at a young age. Orenstein shares with readers the implications of such a society, and how ignoring these implications could in fact harm young women in the long run.

[*Manhood for Amateurs: The Pleasures and Regrets of a Husband, Father, and Son*](#) by Michael Chabon

Pulitzer Prize-winning author presents a series of essays examining what it means to be a man. Blending memoir and philosophy, Chabon fearlessly explores the role he has played in the lives of his family members: as a spouse, a father, and a son. In recounting his own childhood experiences, his parents' divorce, his youthful adventures and coming of age, Chabon crafts a universal investigation into the nature of manhood.

[*Opposite of Fate: A Book of Musings*](#) by Amy Tan

Amy Tan, by her own estimation, has experienced both luck and the opposite of it in her life. Her Chinese-American family was overwhelmingly superstitious, and in this collection of musings and meditations on the role of fate and destiny in her life, the author recalls events from her family's history as well as her not-so-distant past that have resembled both serendipity and curse. She writes about her trials in the publishing world, conflicts in her family, her experience with the making of the screen adaptation of *The Joy Luck Club*,

as well as her musical kinship with publishing heavyweights Stephen King and Barbara Kingsolver.

[*Raising Resilient Children*](#) by Robert Brooks; Sam Goldstein

Psychologists Robert Brooks and Sam Goldstein have written a comprehensive guidebook detailing the most effective methods for promoting resilience in children and inspiring compassion, motivation, and emotional stability.

[*Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*](#) by Mary Pipher

Young girls are suffering from depression, drug abuse, eating disorders and despair now more than ever. In an image-conscious, sex-obsessed culture, girls find themselves trapped by their changing bodies and minds and the unrealistic expectations of society. Dr. Pipher documents their pain and offers strategies for adults who want to help today's adolescent girls.

[*See Jane Win: The Rimm Report on How 1,000 Girls Became Successful Women*](#) by Sylvia Rimm; Ilonna Jane Rimm

Child psychologist Sylvia B. Rimm worked with her two daughters, a research psychologist and a pediatric oncology researcher, to compile information based on interviews with more than a thousand successful women. The authors explore these women's backgrounds to determine what they have in common, in an attempt to isolate the key factors that led them to become personally and professionally fulfilled. As a result, the authors offer advice to young girls and guidelines for parents raising daughters.



Ann Arbor District Library